

Inside Our Nation's Only Unicameral



Origin of the Unicameral

Nebraska's Legislature is unique among all state governments in the country because it has a single group, or one house, of lawmakers. This was not always the case, however.

When Nebraska became a state, it operated a bicameral legislature like the rest of the country, which lasted for the first 68 years of the state's existence. It took decades of work to convince Nebraskans to scrap the two-house system (see Norton excerpt, right) before interest in the cost-saving aspects of a unicameral gained popularity during the Great Depression. The cause also was helped by a zealous petition campaign led by the popular and prestigious U.S. Sen. George W. Norris and the fact that two other popular proposals were on the ballot that year: a local option on prohibition and legalized pari-mutuel betting. In 1934, voters finally decided to reform their state legislature on a 286,086 to 193,152 vote.

Picking up where Norton and others left off, Norris decried the two-house system as outdated, inefficient and unnecessary. He spread his message via radio broadcasts, editorials and personal appearances, traveling so often that he wore out two sets of automobile tires.

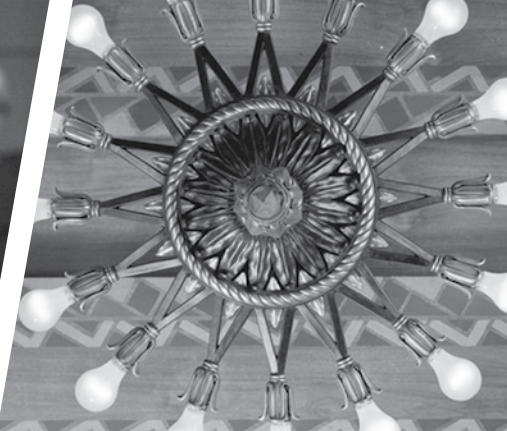
Norris said the bicameral system was modeled after the British Parliament, which is made up of the House of Commons—with representatives elected by the people—and the House of Lords, with its aristocratic members appointed by the king or queen.

"The constitutions of our various states are built upon the idea that there is but one class. If this be true, there is no sense or reason in having the same thing done twice, especially if it is to be done by two bodies of men elected in the same way and having the same jurisdiction," Norris said.

A common question raised during the consideration of the unicameral was how to preserve the scrutiny that occurs between houses of a bicameral to prevent abuse of power. Norris argued that legislation would be monitored by the Supreme Court and the governor's veto power. More importantly, he said, the people's right to vote and petition would counteract the possible abuse of power

"There is no sense or reason in having the same thing done twice, especially if it is to be done by two bodies of men elected in the same way and having the same jurisdiction."

~U.S. Sen. George Norris



by their elected officials. The Nebraska Unicameral would have straightforward procedures and extend greater privileges to the press to allow for greater public awareness.

“Every act of the legislature and every act of each individual must be transacted in the spotlight of publicity,” Norris said.

In a one-house legislature, Norris said, no actions could be concealed as was commonly done in the conference committees of bicameral legislatures.

Conference committees resolve differences when bills passed in both houses vary in content. In Nebraska, the appointed six-member committee met in secret, and members’ votes were not public record. Norris said these committees had too much power and could be easily influenced by lobbyists.

Once a bill came out of the conference committee, it could not be changed, only approved or rejected. If rejected, another committee had to be formed to work out the disagreements, or the measure failed. Today, lawmakers may propose amendments and debate them outside of committee on the chamber floor.

Some say that the conference committees of the two-house system prevent hasty legislation, but the unicameral system has safeguards against this possibility. Nearly all bills must have public hearings, five days must elapse between a bill’s introduction and its passage, and bills may contain only one subject.

Another unique aspect of Nebraska’s legislature is its nonpartisanship, which was included in the successful 1934 unicameral amendment. Norris worked to eliminate partisanship in the Legislature because he believed lawmakers should base their actions on their own convictions and the needs of their districts, rather than according to party dictates. National party lines, he argued, often have little to do with local government.

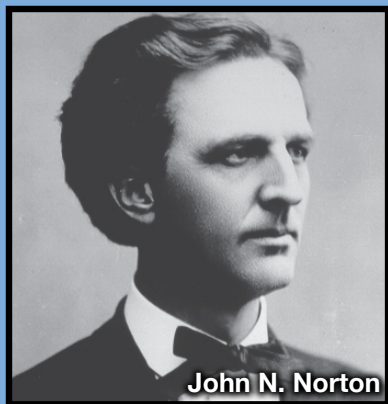
Implementation of the unicameral in 1937 brought immediate change. Legislative membership went from 133 in the bicameral to 43 in the new single house—nearly a 70 percent reduction. Efficiency also improved. The number of committees decreased from 61 to 18, with 581 bills introduced in 1937, as opposed to twice that many the previous session. The last bicameral session in 1935 lasted 110 days, passed 192 bills, and cost \$202,593. The first unicameral session two years later ran 98 days, passed 214 bills and cost \$103,445.

Movements for unicameralism have existed throughout the United States since the nation’s independence. As in Nebraska’s past, dozens of attempts in other states to become one-house legislatures have failed.

The Unicameral’s first clerk, Hugo Srb, predicted that lawmakers in other states would be unlikely to legislate their own jobs out of existence. More than three-quarters of a century later, his prophecy still holds true.



The first Unicameral convened on Jan. 5 1937.



John N. Norton

Laying the foundation for Unicameralism

Efforts to adopt unicameralism in Nebraska began in 1913, when Rep. John N. Norton of Osceola helped form a legislative committee to study ways to improve state government. Part of the committee’s plan, first presented to the Legislature in 1915, recommended a one-house system. It was not enacted.

Numerous attempts by Norton and others to switch to a unicameral legislature reached varying degrees of success in following years. In 1917, a constitutional amendment to create a single 60-member house was indefinitely postponed; in 1920 a tie vote prevented the measure from appearing on a special election ballot; in 1923 a petition campaign failed; and in 1933, the motion reached the final reading stage before being rejected by senators.

While U.S. Sen. George Norris typically is seen as the driving force behind the change to unicameralism in Nebraska, Norton’s work to shape the state’s legislature merits recognition. After the successful vote to become a unicameral, Norton served as the District 24 representative in the first unicameral legislature in 1937, helping to implement this new form of government.



About the Senators

There are 49 districts represented in the Nebraska Unicameral, each containing approximately 37,000 people. Senators are elected to four-year terms and receive an annual salary of \$12,000. Sessions begin in January and consist of 90 working days in odd-numbered years and 60 working days in even-numbered years. Long sessions usually last until early June, and short sessions until mid-April. Special sessions may be held at the call of the governor or two-thirds of the Legislature.

A typical session day for a senator could include a meeting over breakfast, a working lunch, visits with constituents, committee hearings, research, floor debate, and conferences. Senators also have obligations during the interim, including communicating with constituents, working on interim studies with committees, and developing bills that they plan to sponsor in the upcoming session.

Senators' duties include:

- representing the people and the best interests of his or her legislative district;
- appropriating funds to further the state's progress and that of its citizens;
- protecting property and persons;
- strengthening our productive capacity and creating new opportunities;
- righting injustices involving the public;
- keeping a careful check on and setting policy for the operation of state government;
- keeping a forum where people can be heard;
- providing a means of access for a private citizen through the maze of government;
- proposing constitutional amendments to be submitted for a vote by the people;
- establishing state policy by introducing bills to create and modify programs and repeal unnecessary laws;
- studying problems and determining whether legislative solutions are needed to correct them; and
- exercising legislative power to the best of his or her ability.



New and returning senators are sworn into office.



Observing the Legislature

The Unicameral meets in the Norris Chamber on the second floor of the State Capitol. During the first half of a legislative session, senators convene there for debate in the mornings and disperse to committee hearings throughout the Capitol in the afternoons. During the second half of session, debate is scheduled for the entire day, with a break for lunch. The agenda is set daily by the speaker of the Legislature and can be found at NebraskaLegislature.gov/calendar. The site also indicates which days the Legislature is in session.



The Clerk of the Legislature and his staff are at the podium at the front of the chamber. Behind them is seated the presiding officer, who calls on senators to speak in the order of their requests. The state's lieutenant governor is officially the president of the Legislature, but this role may be filled by senators in his or her absence. The senator introducing a bill may speak for 10 minutes when he or she first presents the matter to the Legislature. Each member is allowed to speak up to three times for not more than five minutes on each occasion.

During the course of debate, senators often meet with each other on the floor to discuss the measure at hand or items scheduled later on the agenda. They also may confer with their staff at the tables located under the balconies or be interviewed by members of the media. Those lobbying the Legislature may request that a senator meet with them in the rotunda behind the glass wall at the rear of the chamber. Because the Unicameral is officially a nonpartisan legislature, senators are not divided by political party in the chamber. Generally, newer senators tend to be seated toward the front of the chamber.

Visitors to the Legislature are invited to observe the proceedings from the balconies above the chamber and may be announced by the presiding officer by request of a senator's office.

Contacting your Senator

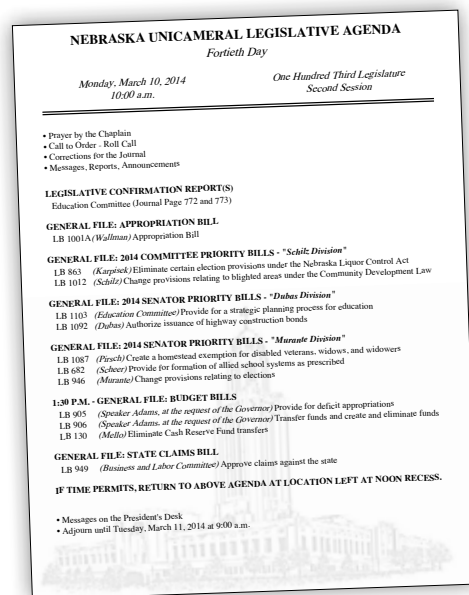
Identifying your senator: Use the "Find your Senator" tool at NebraskaLegislature.gov/find or contact your county clerk or county election commissioner to determine which district you reside in and which senator represents it.

Personal meetings: The best way to set up a meeting with a senator is to contact his or her legislative office and work with the staff member who handles the senator's schedule.

Phone calls: Phone calls are effective because they allow for direct contact between constituents and legislators and are often easier to schedule than personal meetings. If a senator is unavailable, his or her staff will see to it that the senator receives your comments.

Email: Senators' email addresses can be found at NebraskaLegislature.gov. Because of the large volume of email a senator's office receives, do not expect an automatic response to every message sent. When sending your senator an email, treat it like a regular letter and place your name and contact information at the bottom of the message to allow the legislator the flexibility to respond to you either electronically or by regular mail.

Letters: Written letters are effective because they allow constituents to thoroughly explain their needs and positions. Focus on the main points you wish to make. A constructive approach to the issue is more likely to receive attention.





Nebraska State Senators • 2015



Sen. Roy Baker
District 30, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 30,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2620
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist30
Elected: 2014
Occupation: consulting firm partner



Sen. Colby Coash
District 27, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 27,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2632
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist27
Elected: 2008, 2012
Occupation: independent consultant, self-employed



Sen. Dave Bloomfield
District 17, Hoskins
Capitol Address: District 17,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2716
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist17
Appointed to Nebraska Legislature: 2010
Elected: 2012
Occupation: semi-retired farmer



Sen. Tanya Cook
District 13, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 13,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2727
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist13
Elected: 2008, 2012
Occupation: communications agency president



Sen. Kate Bolz
District 29, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 29,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2734
Elected: 2012
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist29
Occupation: executive director, instructor



Sen. Joni Craighead
District 6, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 6,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2714
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist06
Elected: 2014
Occupation: realtor, real estate developer



Sen. Lydia Brasch
District 16, Bancroft
Capitol Address: District 16,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2728
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist16
Elected: 2010, 2014
Occupation: farmer, business owner



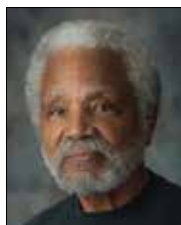
Sen. Sue Crawford
District 45, Bellevue
Capitol Address: District 45,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2615
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist45
Elected: 2012
Occupation: political science professor



Sen. Kathy Campbell
District 25, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 25,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2731
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist25
Elected: 2008, 2012
Occupation: retired



Sen. Al Davis
District 43, Hyannis
Capitol Address: District 43,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2628
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist43
Elected: 2012
Occupation: rancher



Sen. Ernie Chambers
District 11, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 11,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2612
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist11
Elected: 1970, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988,
1992, 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2012
Occupation: defender of the downtrodden



Sen. Laura Ebke
District 32, Crete
Capitol Address: District 32,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2711
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist32
Elected: 2014
Occupation: adjunct college instructor



Sen. Curt Friesen
District 34, Henderson
Capitol Address: District 34,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2630
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist34
Elected: 2014
Occupation: farmer



Sen. Matt Hansen
District 26, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 26,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2610
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist26
Elected: 2014
Occupation: state senator



Sen. Tommy Garrett
District 3, Bellevue
Capitol Address: District 3,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2627
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist03
Appointed: 2013
Elected: 2014
Occupation: president and CEO



Sen. Burke Harr
District 8, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 8,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2722
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist08
Elected: 2010, 2014
Occupation: attorney



Sen. Mike Gloor
District 35, Grand Island
Capitol Address: District 35,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2617
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist35
Elected: 2008, 2012
Occupation: retired hospital CEO



Sen. Robert Hilkemann
District 4, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 4,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2621
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist04
Elected: 2014
Occupation: retired podiatrist



Sen. Michael Groene
District 42, North Platte
Capitol Address: District 42,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2729
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist42
Elected: 2014
Occupation: territorial sales manager



Sen. Sara Howard
District 9, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 9,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2723
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist09
Elected: 2012
Occupation: development director



Sen. Ken Haar
District 21, Malcolm
Capitol Address: District 21,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2673
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist21
Elected: 2008, 2012
Occupation: president and CEO



Sen. Dan Hughes
District 44, Venango
Capitol Address: District 44,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2805
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist44
Elected: 2014
Occupation: farmer, businessman



Sen. Galen Hadley
District 37, Kearney
Capitol Address: District 37,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2726
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist37
Elected: 2008, 2012
Occupation: professor emeritus



Sen. Jerry Johnson
District 23, Wahoo
Capitol Address: District 23,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2719
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist23
Elected: 2012
Occupation: retired



Sen. Bill Kintner
District 2, Papillion
Capitol Address: District 2,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2613
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist02
Elected: 2012, 2014
Occupation: market research sales



Sen. Brett Lindstrom
District 18, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 18,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2618
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist18
Elected: 2014
Occupation: financial advisor



Sen. Rick Kolowski
District 31, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 31,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2327
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist31
Elected: 2012
Occupation: educational consultant



Sen. John McCollister
District 20, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 20,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2622
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist20
Elected: 2014
Occupation: business principal



Sen. Mark Kolterman
District 24, Seward
Capitol Address: District 24,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2756
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist24
Elected: 2014
Occupation: insurance professional



Sen. Beau McCoy
District 39, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 39,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2885
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist39
Elected: 2008, 2012
Occupation: home improvement contractor,
business owner



Sen. Bob Krist
District 10, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 10,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2718
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist10
Appointed: 2009
Elected: 2010, 2014
Occupation: contract manager and chief pilot



Sen. Heath Mello
District 5, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 5,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2710
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist05
Elected: 2008, 2012
Occupation: community affairs and
development specialist



Sen. John Kuehn
District 38, Heartwell
Capitol Address: District 38,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2732
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist38
Elected: 2014
Occupation: rancher, veterinarian, professor



Sen. Adam Morfeld
District 46, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 46,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist46
Phone: 402-471-2720
Elected: 2014
Occupation: nonprofit executive director



Sen. Tyson Larson
District 40, O'Neill
Capitol Address: District 40,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2801
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist40
Elected: 2010, 2014
Occupation: entrepreneur



Sen. John Murante
District 49, Gretna
Capitol Address: District 49,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2725
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist49
Elected: 2012
Occupation: restaurant CEO



Sen. Jeremy Nordquist
District 7, Omaha
Capitol Address: District 7,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2721
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist07
Elected: 2008, 2012
Occupation: state senator



Sen. David Schnoor
District 15, Scribner
Capitol Address: District 15,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2625
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist15
Appointed: 2014
Occupation: farmer, cattle feeder



Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks
District 28, Lincoln
Capitol Address: District 28,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2633
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist28
Elected: 2014
Occupation: attorney



Sen. Paul Schumacher
District 22, Columbus
Capitol Address: District 22,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2715
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist22
Elected: 2010, 2014
Occupation: attorney, business president



Sen. Merv Riepe
District 12, Ralston
Capitol Address: District 12,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2623
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist12
Elected: 2014
Occupation: state senator



Sen. Les Seiler
District 33, Hastings
Capitol Address: District 33,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2712
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist33
Appointed: 2012
Elected: 2012
Occupation: attorney



Sen. Jim Scheer
District 19, Norfolk
Capitol Address: District 19,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2929
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist19
Elected: 2012
Occupation: insurance agency owner



Sen. Jim Smith
District 14, Papillion
Capitol Address: District 14,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2730
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist14
Elected: 2010, 2014
Occupation: business owner



Sen. Ken Schilz
District 47, Ogallala
Capitol Address: District 47,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2616
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist47
Elected: 2008, 2012
Occupation: cattle feeder, farmer



Sen. John Stinner
District 48, Gering
Capitol Address: District 48,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2802
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist48
Elected: 2014
Occupation: banking chairman and CEO



Sen. Kate Sullivan
District 41, Cedar Rapids
Capitol Address: District 41,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2631
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist41
Elected: 2008, 2012
Occupation: banker, bank board of directors, farm president



Sen. Dan Watermeier
District 1, Syracuse
Capitol Address: District 1,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2733
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist01
Elected: 2012
Occupation: farmer



Sen. Matt Williams
District 36, Gothenburg
Capitol Address: District 36,
P.O. Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2642
Web page: news.legislature.ne.gov/dist36
Elected: 2014
Occupation: banker



Our Legislative Process

The need for a new law may be suggested by anyone: concerned citizens, special interest groups, state agencies, the governor, or the senators themselves. The idea must be introduced as a bill by a senator or a committee to be considered by the Legislature. A bill must follow this process to successfully become a law in Nebraska:

1 BILL RESEARCH, DRAFTING and INTRODUCTION

Research

First, a senator and his or her staff research a problem and study possible legislative remedies. A senator may introduce a bill to create a new law or to repeal or change an existing law. Legislators have staff to help with their research projects. Much of their research is done during the period between sessions, which is called the interim. During this time, legislative committees study a variety of issues that have been outlined in interim study resolutions passed by the Legislature.

Drafting

A senator brings his or her idea for a new law to a bill drafter, who works with the senator to transform the idea into the proper legal form for a bill. Unlike some states, Nebraska requires that each introduced bill contain only one subject.

Introduction

Bills are introduced during the first 10 days of the legislative session. In order to introduce a bill, a senator files it with the Clerk of the Legislature. The clerk reads the title of the bill into the record, assigns it a number, and prints copies of it for public and legislative use.

Fiscal Note

The Legislative Fiscal Office prepares budget statements that estimate the anticipated change in state, county, or municipal expenses or revenue under the provisions of each bill. These statements are called fiscal notes and each contains three estimates: one calculated by the Fiscal Office staff, another prepared by the governor's budget office, and a third prepared by the affected state agency. Additionally, the Fiscal Office prepares appropriation bills ("A bills"), which accompany bills that require an appropriation.

2

COMMITTEES

Every introduced bill receives a public hearing by a legislative committee. A nine-member Reference Committee determines which bills will be heard by each of the 14 standing committees. At hearings, citizens have a chance to express their opinions to the committee members. Testimony is recorded, transcribed, and made part of the official committee record. After the hearing, committees may vote to send a bill to general file with or without amendments, indefinitely postpone the bill, or take no action.

ADVANCE

HOLD

FAIL

LAWS OF NEBRASKA

**3**

GENERAL FILE

General file is the first time the full Legislature has the opportunity to debate and vote on bills. At this stage, senators consider amendments, which may be proposed by committees or individual senators. It takes a majority vote of the Legislature--25 votes--to adopt amendments or move a bill from general file to the next stage of consideration.

ADVANCE

AMEND

FAIL

4

SELECT FILE

Select file is the second debating and voting stage. This step allows another opportunity for amendment, compromise, and reflection. Bills on select file may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed, or advanced to the next stage, again, with a vote of 25.

ADVANCE

AMEND

FAIL

6

GOVERNOR

After the Legislature passes a bill on final reading, it goes to the governor for consideration. The governor has five days, excluding Sundays, to act on a bill. If the governor signs a bill or does nothing with it, the bill becomes a state law. If the bill is vetoed, the Legislature may override a gubernatorial veto with a vote of 30 senators.

Most bills passed and approved by the governor become law three calendar months after the Legislature adjourns. However, bills may take effect before then if they contain an emergency clause or another specified operative date.

SIGN

DECLINE
TO SIGN

VETO

VETO
OVERRIDEVETO
SUSTAINED**5**

FINAL READING

Before final passage, bills are constitutionally required to be read aloud in their entirety by the Clerk of the Legislature, unless three-fifths, or 30 members, of the Legislature vote to waive the requirement.

A bill may not be amended or debated on final reading, but it may be returned to select file for a specific amendment.

Bills may not be voted on for final passage until at least five legislative days after the bill is introduced and one legislative day after it is placed on final reading.

PASS

FAIL



The Legislative Divisions

The Nebraska Legislature requires numerous offices and support staff to help it fulfill its responsibilities. In addition to the personal staff of each senator and committee staff, the Legislative Council's support offices are the Clerk of the Legislature, the Revisor of Statutes, the Legislative Fiscal Office, the Legislative Audit Office, the Legislative Research Office, the Office of Public Counsel, the Accounting and Budget Office and the Coordinator of Legislative Services.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL AND EXECUTIVE BOARD

Legislative Council

All state senators are members of this council, which considers legislative policies between sessions and carries out other duties such as collecting information concerning the government and general welfare of the state, examining the effects of previously enacted statutes, preparing a legislative program of bills to be presented at the next legislative session, advising the Legislature of available federal aid, maintaining Nebraska's bill drafting service and setting up subcommittees to investigate areas of public interest.

Executive Board

The Legislative Council is governed by the Executive Board, which supervises all legislative services and employees. The nine-member board consists of a chairperson, vice-chairperson, the speaker and six other senators--two for each of three groups of legislative districts. When fiscal matters are considered, the board also includes the Appropriations Committee chairperson as a nonvoting ex officio member.

**ACCOUNTING
OFFICE**

**COORDINATOR OF
LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES**



CLERK OF THE LEGISLATURE



Elected by the Legislature, the Clerk assists in the administrative operation of the Unicameral. Duties include preserving daily floor debate and documents of the Legislature, publishing the daily and permanent Legislative Journal, compiling the Laws of Nebraska after each session, distributing bills to senators and the public, supervising sessional employees, overseeing use of legislative space, and registering lobbyists.

Patrick J. O'Donnell

Room 2018, State Capitol • P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509 • 402-471-2271

REVISOR OF STATUTES



The Revisor's Office drafts and prepares all bills, resolutions, and most amendments, reviews bills for correct form and craftsmanship, incorporates all enacted legislation into the Nebraska Statutes, reports any defects found in state statutes or the Nebraska Constitution and drafts proposed legislation to correct the defects.

Joanne Pepperl

Room 358, State Capitol • P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509 • 402-471-2225

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL ANALYST



The Fiscal Office provides fiscal and management information and assistance to the Legislature and the Appropriations Committee. This includes reviewing the financial impact of every bill and amendment, and involves examining the state agencies' management and finances to improve efficiency and services.

Michael Calvert

Room 1007, State Capitol • P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509 • 402-471-2263;
Fax: 402-479-0959

LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR



The Audit Office conducts performance audits on topics selected by the Legislative Performance Audit Committee. Performance auditing is a systematic review of any aspect of agencies and their programs to evaluate agencies' success in effectively implementing legislative intent. Suggestions for performance audits may be made by legislators, constitutional officers and legislative division directors.

Martha Carter

State Capitol, 11th Floor • P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509 • 402-471-1282

DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH



The Research Office conducts research and interim studies for legislative committees, state senators and staff. Duties include preparing research memoranda and reports, conducting special projects for the Executive Board of the Legislative Council, maintaining a reference library, disseminating information to senators and staff, and exchanging information with other state legislatures and national legislative organizations.

Nancy Cyr

Room 1201, State Capitol • P.O. Box 94604
Lincoln, NE 68509 • 402-471-2221

PUBLIC COUNSEL (OMBUDSMAN)



This independent governmental office receives, investigates and informally resolves complaints made by citizens relating to administrative agencies of state government, recommends ways to improve agencies' policies and procedures, and answers questions about government operation.

Marshall Lux

Room 807, State Capitol • P.O. Box 94604
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Glossary of Legislative Terms

Appropriation Bill ("A" Bill) - a bill to appropriate funds to finance another bill bearing the same number.

Act - the proper name for a bill after it is enacted into law. Also, a term used to refer to a group of laws addressing a particular subject, such as the Nebraska Affordable Housing Act.

Agenda - a daily order of legislative business set by the Speaker.

Attorney General's Opinion - a written analysis of a question of law prepared by the attorney general for the governor, the head of an executive department or any state senator.

Biennium - the two-year period in which a single Legislature, such as the 104th Legislature, exists. Also, the two fiscal years for which a single Legislature does budget planning and makes appropriations.

Bracket - to delay consideration of a bill.

Call of the House - a procedure used to compel attendance of unexcused senators in the chamber.

Carry-Over Legislation - bills and resolutions introduced during the regular session in an odd-numbered year and held over for consideration during the regular session in an even-numbered year.

Chair - the presiding officer.

Cloture - a parliamentary action to cease debate on a bill and vote immediately on its advancement. A motion for cloture may be made after full and fair debate on a bill at any stage of consideration.

Committee on Committees - the select committee that proposes appointments of senators to other legislative committees at the beginning of each biennium.

Committee Statement - a statement indicating whether a committee voted to advance or indefinitely postpone a particular bill. It includes the roll call vote of committee members, a summary of the bill and any proposed committee amendments, and a list of who testified at the bill's hearing.

Constitutional Amendment Resolution (CA) - a proposal to amend the state constitution, ratify or reject an amendment to the U.S. Constitution or petition Congress about amending the U.S. Constitution. State CA resolutions have the suffix "CA" by the resolution number, and they must be approved by the voters as well as the Legislature.

Consent Calendar - a portion of the agenda in which relatively noncontroversial bills are considered and quickly advanced to the next legislative stage. Usually, a bill on consent calendar can be debated for no more than 15 minutes.

Emergency Clause ("E" Clause) - a provision that allows a bill or a portion of a bill to take effect immediately after the governor signs it or after the Legislature overrides the governor's veto.

Engrossment - the process of preparing a bill for Final Reading by incorporating all adopted amendments.

Enrollment and Review (E&R) - the process of incorporating adopted amendments into a bill and reviewing the bill for technical and grammatical accuracy.

Executive Board of the Legislative Council - a nine-member special committee that oversees legislative services, personnel and other internal affairs of the Legislature. The Executive Board also serves as the Reference Committee.

Executive Session - a closed meeting of a committee to discuss and act on bills and resolutions. An executive session is open only to committee members, staff and the media.

Final Reading - the third and last stage at which a bill is considered by the entire Legislature. The clerk reads the entire bill aloud, unless final reading is waived, and senators vote without debate on whether to submit the bill to the governor.

Fiscal Note - a statement prepared by the Legislative Fiscal Office estimating the effect a bill would have on state and/or local expenditures and revenue.

Floor - the area of the legislative chamber where the senators sit. When a committee advances a bill "to the floor," that means the bill is being sent to the full Legislature for consideration.

General File - the first stage at which a bill is considered by the full Legislature. Bills on General File may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to Select File.

Germane - relevant to the specific subject of the bill being considered. Any amendment that is not germane is out of order.

Hearing - a regularly scheduled committee meeting to receive public comment on proposed bills and resolutions.

House Under Call - the term used when all unexcused senators are required to be in their seats in the chamber and unauthorized personnel must leave the floor.

Indefinitely Postpone (IPP) - to suspend all further activity on a bill or resolution.

Initiative - the power of the people, through the petition process, to enact laws and adopt constitutional amendments independently of the Legislature.

Interim - the period between legislative sessions.

Legislative Bill (LB) - a proposal to create, change or delete one or more laws.

Legislative History - the committee and floor debate records for any bill. A history includes transcripts of the bill's hearing and all floor debate.



Legislative Journal - official record of legislative floor action, including all motions, the number of “yeas” and “nays” on each vote, etc.

Legislative Resolution (LR) - a proposal to make a formal expression of opinion, intent or recognition; amend the state or federal constitution; or authorize an interim study of an issue.

Line-Item Veto - the power of the governor to make specific reductions in any part of a budget bill passed by the Legislature.

Machine Vote - a vote taken by electronic voting system. The voting board shows how each senator voted, but only vote totals are entered in the Legislative Journal.

Major Proposal - a bill or constitutional amendment resolution that the speaker designates as important enough for scheduling priority. Each session, up to five bills may be chosen as major proposals, all of which must be senator priority bills and have the approval of two-thirds of the Executive Board.

One-liner - a one-line description of a bill or resolution.

President of the Legislature - the lieutenant governor. While senators address whomever is in the chair as Mr. or Madame President, the lieutenant governor alone holds that official title.

Presiding Officer - the president or the senator currently presiding over legislative proceedings.

Priority Bill - a bill that has priority status and generally is considered ahead of other bills in debate. Each senator may select one priority bill, each committee may select two priority bills and the speaker may select up to 25 priority bills.

Record Vote - a vote for which a record is kept of how each senator voted. The vote is taken by electronic voting system, and the senators' names and corresponding votes are then printed in the Legislative Journal.

Reference Committee - the committee, made up of the nine Executive Board members, that refers bills, resolutions and gubernatorial appointments to other committees.

Referendum - the power of the people, through the petition process, to repeal or amend any act or part of an act of the Legislature.

Regular Session - the annual session that begins the first Wednesday after the first Monday of each January.

Revisor Bill - a bill, prepared by the Office of the Revisor of Statutes, proposing a technical correction or the repeal of an obsolete statute.

Roll Call Vote - a vote during which the senators vote one at a time as the clerk reads their names. Senators cast their votes verbally, and their names and corresponding votes are printed in the Legislative Journal if the house is under call.

Select Committee - a permanent committee with a subject-matter jurisdiction related to the administration of the Legislature.

Select File - the second stage at which a bill is considered by the entire Legislature. Bills on Select File may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to Final Reading.

Session - a period of time, usually a number of days, during which the Legislature meets and transacts business. See Regular Session, Special Session.

Sine Die - without setting a future date for reconvening. When the Legislature adjourns sine die, the legislative session is finished for the year.

Slip Law - a bill or constitutional amendment resolution printed individually in its approved form after being enacted into law or submitted to voters.

Speaker of the Legislature - the officer of the Legislature, elected from among the senators, who prepares the daily agenda and the session calendar and who presides in the absence of the lieutenant governor.

Special Committee - a committee created by law for a specific reason. Except for the Executive Board, special committees have no jurisdiction over bills or resolutions.

Special Session - a limited legislative session called for a specific purpose by the governor or two-thirds (33 members) of the Legislature.

Standing Committee - a permanent committee with a subject-matter jurisdiction related to an area of public policy. Almost all bills and resolutions are referred to one of the 14 standing committees.

Statement of Intent - a statement, prepared by the sponsor of a bill, that briefly describes the bill and the reasons why it is being introduced.

Summary Sheet - a daily list of all legislative activity that has taken place in one legislative day, including action taken on bills and resolutions.

Veto - the power of the governor to reject bills passed by the Legislature. The governor has five days, excluding Sundays, to either sign or veto a bill. The Legislature then has an opportunity to override the veto.

Veto Override - the power of the Legislature to pass a bill over the governor's veto. A veto override requires the approval of three-fifths (30 members) of the Legislature.

Voice Vote - a vote in which senators cast their votes orally and no totals are recorded.

Worksheet - a list, prepared daily, that indicates the status of all bills and resolutions at the end of that legislative day.

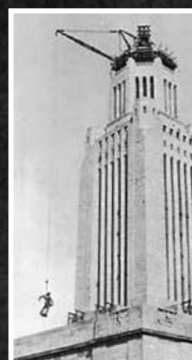
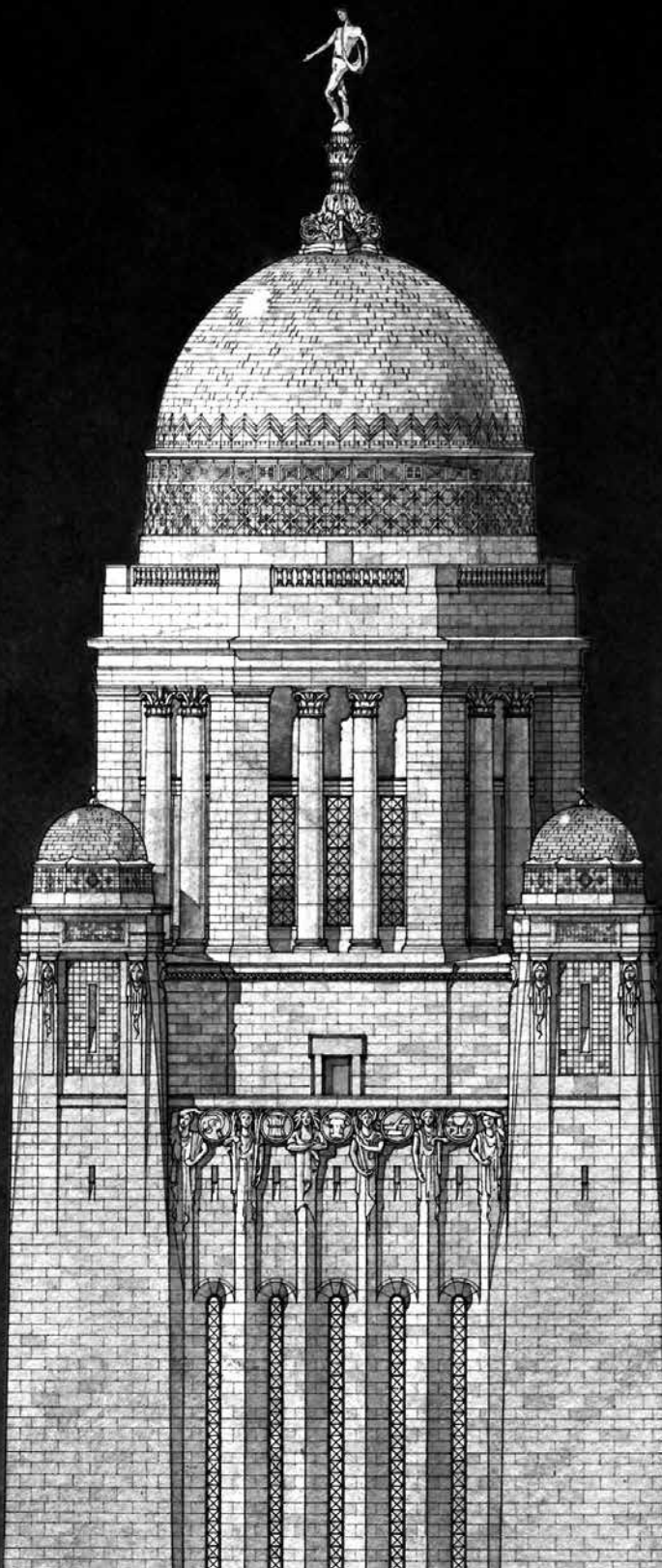


Tower on the Prairie

Designed by architect Bertram Goodhue and completed in 1932, the Nebraska State Capitol is the third home built in Lincoln for the Nebraska Legislature. Goodhue's design (see original drawing left) was selected by the State Capitol Commission in 1920 over nine other submissions as the winner of the Capitol design competition.

A railway for transporting construction materials encircled the site and state employees remained in the second capitol while their new offices were built around them. When the north and south portions of the perimeter structure were complete, workers moved into the new sections while the old capitol was razed and the remaining sections and 400 ft. limestone tower were built.

The Sower, created in bronze by sculptor Lee Lawrie, is 19 ft. tall, weighs 8.5 tons, and was lifted into place via crane. Mosaics throughout the capitol were designed by artist Hildreth Meiere. Murals in the governor's suite are by Augustus Tack. The three rotunda murals are by Kenneth Evett, and the murals adorning the 14th floor Memorial Chamber are by Stephen Roberts.





During your Visit

Take a tour: The Capitol is located in Lincoln at 1445 K. St. Call the Capitol Tours Office at 402-471-0448 or visit capitol.nebraska.gov for more information and tour hours.

Watch floor debate: If the Legislature is in session, you can watch senators debate from a balcony in the Norris Chamber. For information regarding the schedule of the Legislature, visit NebraskaLegislature.gov.

Attend a committee hearing: During session, the Legislature holds numerous committee hearings that are open to the public. Check the public hearing schedule posted on NebraskaLegislature.gov.

Meet your senator: Stop by your senator's office to visit or introduce yourself to their staff. Be sure to contact your senator's office in advance to make an appointment.

Visit the observation deck: The observation deck on the 14th floor is open to visitors during public hours, as weather permits.



View south from the observation deck

See the Nebraska Hall of Fame: Bronze busts of the Nebraska Hall of Fame members are located on the second floor.

View photos of state senators: Historic photos of state senators are displayed in the west hallway of the first floor.

The Norris and Warner Chambers

Because the Nebraska Legislature still was a bicameral legislature when its current Capitol was designed and constructed, the building has two separate legislative chambers.

Located on the east side of the rotunda, the Warner Chamber (photo, right) housed Nebraska's Senate until 1937 and features a tiled, domed ceiling depicting the Native American culture. The

Unicameral now meets in the Norris Chamber (photo, left), which features a beamed ceiling of Nebraska walnut that provides an ornate history lesson displayed in gold leaf applique.

The first cross beam, with Spanish lions and castles, identifies our first landowners. The second beam, with the Fleur-de-lis and Napoleonic bees, documents the French ownership of the Nebraska territory until the Louisiana Purchase. The third beam documents our own influence with the American shield and eagle. The south panel beam depicts

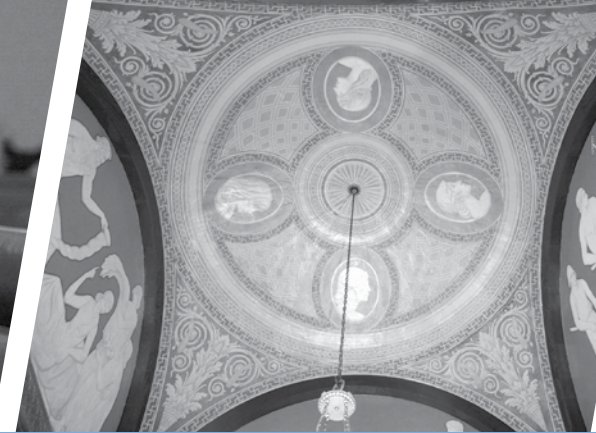


the Lewis and Clark, Sievr DeBourmond and Coronado expeditions. The north panel shows the U.S. survey, cattlemen, and homesteaders.

Although restored in 2008, few changes have been made to the room. Originally, the chamber contained seats for 100 lawmakers, a number of which were removed following the adoption of the unicameral system. The legislative floor now seats 49 senators, two sergeants at arms, and a few extra seats for persons attending special occasions. The senators' desks are crafted of North American walnut.



The large display panels that flank the voting board were installed in 1985 when the voting system was computerized. Designed to blend with the limestone wall at the front of the chamber, the panels tell senators which bill is being considered, who sponsors it, and the specific item under consideration.



Student Programs

Unicameral Youth Legislature

The Unicameral Youth Legislature is a four-day legislative simulation in which students assume the roles of lawmakers. Student senators discover the unique process of our nation's only unicameral by sponsoring bills, conducting committee hearings, and debating legislation.

Students learn the details of the unicameral directly from senators, staff, and lobbyists using bill topics based on actual legislation considered during the most recent legislative session. The student senators will debate in the historic Warner Chamber, home to the Nebraska Senate until the state consolidated to a one-house legislature in 1937.

The Unicameral Youth Legislature takes place every June and is open to all high school students. To learn more about the camp and available scholarships, visit NebraskaLegislature.gov/uyl or contact 402-471-0764 or uio@leg.ne.gov.

Meet Your Senator

Invite your state senator to your classroom! America's Legislators Back to School Program, sponsored by the National Conference of State Legislatures, connects senators with students in their districts. The program presents an opportunity for senators to teach students about the responsibilities of a senator, the legislative process, and how lawmakers work together to solve problems. We invite you to contact your senator's office throughout the year to arrange a visit.

Likewise, if you are planning a field trip to the Capitol, contact your senator's office to ask if he or she is available to visit with your students while they are here. Tours of the State Capitol can be scheduled through the Tours Office at 402-471-0448.

For more information, visit NebraskaLegislature.gov/students.

A student senator explains her bill during floor debate.



Publications and Online Resources

Unicameral Update

The Unicameral Update is the Legislature's official news source, produced since 1977 by the Clerk of the Legislature's Unicameral Information Office. News stories about legislative hearings and floor debate are posted daily throughout session at Update.Legislature.ne.gov. A free weekly print publication also is available. Call 402-471-2788 or email uio@leg.ne.gov to subscribe.

The site provides RSS feeds of stories by committee and maintains a Twitter feed at twitter.com/UnicamUpdate. A teacher's guide is provided on the website and suggests ways to incorporate the resource into civics and government lessons.



Unicam Kids: A Student Guide to the Nebraska Legislature

This online program and companion booklet are colorful guides for students grades 4-6 that teach about the senators, history, and processes of the Nebraska Legislature. Unicam Kids also features puzzles and quizzes designed to test a student's knowledge of the material. See the website at NebraskaLegislature.gov/uk or email uio@leg.ne.gov to order free booklets.

Capitol Classroom

This is a unique curriculum that teaches high school students about the unicameral's legislative process. It includes a committee hearing simulation in which students play the roles of senators, lobbyists and concerned citizens. Materials to guide a floor debate are also provided, along with a public policy development exercise.

Nebraska Blue Book

The Nebraska Blue Book is a resource manual that provides information about Nebraska's government, geography, economy, history and culture. They can be purchased by calling 402-471-2271 and viewed at NebraskaLegislature.gov/bluebook.

Legislative Page Program

Legislative pages are college students who assist senators and others by distributing information, making copies and completing various tasks during committee hearings and floor debate.

Pages work four-hour shifts, five days a week. Depending on the school, pages may also earn college credit.

To receive an application, contact the Clerk of the Legislature's Office at 402-471-2271.



